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September 13, 1965.

TO: The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S

FROM: FE - William P. Bundy

SUBJECT: Weekend Press Stories on Montagnard Situation in South Viet-Nam.

The problem of Montagnard-Vietnamese relations is a long-standing one, centering around Montagnard grievances against successive Vietnamese governments on questions of land and general unequal treatment. Traditionally, Vietnamese officials and Vietnamese generally have considered the Montagnards an inferior people. Although CIA and MACV have for some years been engaged in training Montagnard strike forces and USOM has carried out programs of assistance to the Montagnards, the GVN has been suspicious of our dealings with the Montagnards despite our very careful efforts to deal with the Montagnards through the GVN.

Last fall a Montagnard revolt occurred among several Rhade strike force groups in Darlac province. The leader of the revolt was Ybham, who escaped to Cambodia and set up a rebel Montagnard organization called FULRO. General Khanh, who was then in power, negotiated with FULRO representatives on a program designed to meet their grievances. While the GVN made some progress in meeting these grievances, successive changes of governments, plus a general lack of inclination on the part of the Vietnamese have not carried the program forward very far.

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In early August 1965 the FULRO organization presented new demands on the government and the government since then has been engaged in a series of very difficult talks with FULRO representatives. In this atmosphere, the GVN requested the U.S. Mission to withdraw two or three Embassy and CIA officials from Darlac province in order to avoid any misunderstandings as to their role in dealing with the Montagnards. The Mission immediately complied but stressed to the GVN that the U.S. officials had been engaged in programs of assistance to the Montagnards which had been approved by the GVN.

We have no telegraphic reports on the reported ARVN operation to round up several hundred Montagnard dissidents, although phone conversations between the MMCC and MACV indicate that this operation has taken place.

25X1 Attached are Saigon's [redacted] giving further background on this matter.

RECOMMENDATION:

In response to press questions it is suggested that you reply using the following points:

1. The U.S. has been engaged for some time in programs of assistance to the GVN for the various Montagnard groups in the Highlands areas.

2. Some weeks ago, at the Vietnamese Government's suggestion, we agreed to withdraw U.S. Mission officials engaged in programs of assistance to the Rhade Montagnard group in Darlac Province, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding between ourselves, the Vietnamese and the Montagnards. The officials were withdrawn from Darlac to Saigon.

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3. There has been no question of any U.S. official being declared persona non grata or being informally asked to leave the country by the Vietnamese Government. Mr. Beachner, a career Foreign Service Officer, and one of the officials withdrawn from Darlac, left Viet-Nam a month ago at the end of his tour of duty. His normal tour had in fact been extended several months, and he departed from Viet-Nam at the end of that extension.

If questions arise regarding the ARVN operation, we recommend that you state that we have no information on this.

If you are asked questions about the New York Times article specifically whether CIA was in contact with FULRO representatives without the knowledge of Mr. Beachner or the Province Chief, it is suggested that you indicate that we have no information on this subject at present.

If asked whether CIA is involved in these programs, you may wish to respond affirmatively, indicating that CIA, along with other elements of the U.S. Mission, notably MACV and USCM, have been working through the GVN on programs of assistance and training for Montagnards.

25X1 [redacted]

FE/VN:RHMiller:mlg 9/13/65

cc: FE/P
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